

5 STEPS TO

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Children need lots of varied nutrients to help them grow, especially during the major periods of growth and physical development — the first few years of life and in the teenage years. But when they take in more calories than they burn throughout the day, the result is weight gain.

Overweight and obesity in childhood have a significant impact on physical and psychological health. Poor food habits will lead to increased body weight and diabetes, early in life. No parent would like to see their child suffering from obesity and diabetes. Prevention of obesity is the key strategy. These strategies can be initiated at home and in schools. Families

1 "Breaking the fast" provides much needed fuel, for the day.

Make sure your child goes to school with breakfast. Going without breakfast will affect our concentration and energy benefits throughout the day. Breakfast increases cognitive ability and concentration which helps to increase children's educational performance. It kick starts your metabolism which then helps to keep you active, and decreases the risk of heart disease.

Many studies have shown that breakfast eaters tend to weigh less than breakfast skippers! Fruit and whole grain toast or cereals with lean protein, such as egg, are excellent for breakfast, and they can keep you satiated and energised for longer.

Like adults, children of school age should need to eat healthy, and balanced diet. The American Academic of Paediatrics recommends feeding a minimum of five times a day to fulfill their needs. Ideally, children need three meals and two snacks, a day: breakfast, morning snack, lunch, afternoon snack, and dinner.

Snacking is a great strategy for boosting and sustaining energy. It keeps blood sugar levels even and facilitates digestion. It also helps you to keep the energy levels to stay more constant throughout the day and your moods more consistently pleasurable! Be more consistent with the time you eat your meals and snacks. Do not allow grazing all day on favourite foods. Here are a few quick snack ideas:

- Half a sandwich with a piece of fruit
- Baby carrots, baby corn, cucumber and celery sticks
- Handful of nuts, raisins
- Wheat crackers/wholemeal bread
- Yoghurt low fat
- Banana, apple or pear

2 How often does your child eat?

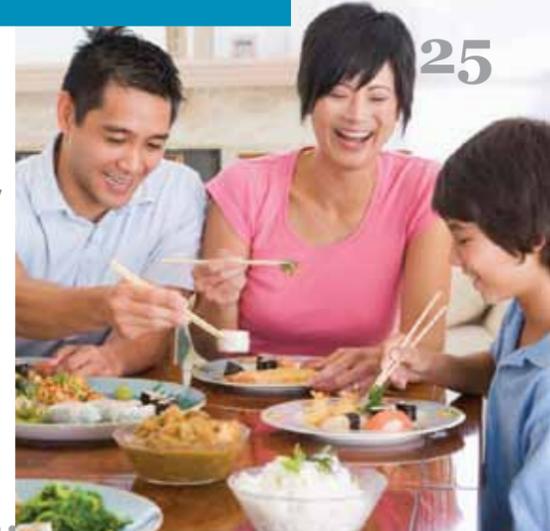
A HEALTHIER FAMILY



3 Are mealtimes relaxed or rushed?

Eating is the time for rejuvenation of the body and spirit and a great time to connect with your children. Faced with any kind of stress, your body will naturally shut down the digestion functions.

In the short term, stress can shut down appetite. But if the stress persists, it is a different story. Cortisol, a stress hormone, will ramp up the motivation to eat more! So, encourage children to relax and enjoy the food. Eating in a state of relaxation will not just enhance your enjoyment, but your digestion and metabolism too!



4 Your children eat what you expose them to

It is important to understand what percentage of your child's foods and drinks are high in sugar and fat, low in fibre, highly processed and contain artificial colours.

Teaching children good eating habits will help them develop healthier bodies and grow as balanced adults. If you offer only healthy foods, that is what they will eat. If you dine on fast foods, that will be their choice for the day!

Children who drink sodas erode their tooth enamel and are also more likely to be obese. Many commercial drinks are marketed as healthy drinks just because they are fruit-based and contain energy boosters. In fact, they are loaded with sugars, artificial sweeteners, phosphoric acid and caffeine that not only erode the tooth enamel, but also decrease bone density.



5 Get some exercise!

School-age children today are living in a technological world. Their access to TV, video games, is increasing with decreasing time for physical activity. Fast food, sodas, vending machines make it too easy for kids to make bad food choices, without the guidance of a parent. Parents should talk to the child about healthy food, cook healthily, encourage them to participate in cooking, and exercise daily and invite the child to join you. Turn the television off, while dining!

As children move into the teenage phase, their metabolic rates soar and you will be amazed to see how much they eat. While this higher consumption of food is not always bad, parents should offer healthier versions of favourite snacks such as low- salt baked chips, and nuts in shells for them to crack open them.

Childhood obesity is caused by an imbalance in calorie intake and calorie utilised. Participating in physical activities helps children and adolescents increase muscle and bone strength; expending energy helps them maintain a healthy weight.

Distance running, swimming, biking are best for burning calories and promoting cardiorespiratory fitness. Weight-baring activities such as jumping rope, walking, playing soccer and basketball help to promote the growth of strong bones during childhood and adolescence and prevent osteoporosis in adulthood. Physical activity can also reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety and improve mood!



References

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